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# Reagan Seized Idea Shelved In '80 Race

## Activists Nurtured Shift to 'Star Wars'

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As he was preparing for his presidential campaign in 1979, Ronald Reagan toured the North American Air Defense Command, buried deep in a Colorado mountain, and asked a general what could be done to stop a Soviet nuclear missile if it were spotted by radar coming toward the United States.

"The answer was, 'Nothing,'" recalled Martin Anderson, who accompanied Reagan on the trip.

That early exchange offers a glimpse at the origins of what may be the most profound decision of the Reagan presidency: to launch the globe-spanning Strategic De-

fense Initiative with the hope of shielding Americans against nuclear attack, and, ultimately, abandoning a doctrine that relies on the threat of mutual annihilation to keep the peace.

## The Cocked Pistols

As early as his unsuccessful 1976 presidential campaign, Reagan was questioning the MAD doctrine. He often compared it to two men pointing pistols at each other's head, with one man's finger tightening on the trigger.

The pistols were his metaphor for the immense "offensive" weaponry of the United States and the Soviet Union. Reagan would say "there has to be another way," but he seemed to be struggling to find it. The seeds of his turn to strategic defense were planted in the mid-1970s.

The superpowers all but abandoned strategic defense with the 1972 antiballistic missile (ABM) treaty, and sought to cap the growth of offensive weapons in the strategic arms limitation talks (SALT I) agreement. But four years later, in his campaign against President Gerald R. Ford, Reagan argued that the Soviet Union had moved ahead of the United States in offensive weapons.

This view was later reinforced when then-CIA Director George Bush invited a group of hawkish outsiders to evaluate the agency's estimate of Soviet military strength. This group, known as Team B, concluded in a secret, highly controversial study that Soviet advances were far more rapid than had been thought.

By 1979, when President Jimmy Carter was struggling with SALT II, Reagan and his aides, including some Team B participants, were planning to base their campaign against Carter in part on the charge that the treaty was flawed, and that Carter had allowed a dangerous weakening of U.S. offensive strength.

That summer, Reagan went to NORAD headquarters in Colorado with Anderson, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, who recalls that they were shown the big screens that track movements along the U.S. coast.

Later, in a discussion with Gen. Jim Hill, then commander-in-chief of NORAD, Anderson recalls Reagan's question. Reagan was "struck by the fact that we were helpless," he said.

Hill, who has since retired, said recently that the Strategic Defense Initiative "is exactly the kind of thing we were talking about at the time," but it was not a detailed proposal.

Reagan later told author Robert Scheer, "I think the thing that struck me was the irony that here, with this great technology of ours, we can do all this yet we cannot stop any of the weapons that are coming at us."

Returning to California in August 1979, Anderson wrote a series of policy memos for Reagan's campaign. "Memorandum No. 3" was on foreign and defense policy. It probably would have caused a sensation had it been made public at the time, when Reagan still was tagged by many as a hawkish, extreme Republican.

Anderson said Reagan had three options in his campaign.

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